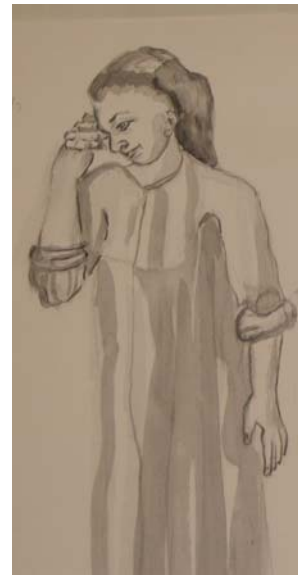




# GRANDMA GRADY'S GRADE-A GRAY DAY

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## The Editors **Conscience Works**

**Conscience Works** has been funded in whole or in part with federal funds from the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, under Contract No. NO1-LM-1-3513.

Mr. and Mrs. Jim Irsay and The Indianapolis Colts, the Moore Foundation and other individual anonymous donors have generously provided additional support for the Indiana University Conscience Project.

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To Mom

## Foreword

Dear Reader:

You are about to read a wondrous tale of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. The story depicts a panorama of life as it relates across three generations to a serious but treatable class of illness that affects up to 20% of people during their lifetime and plays a major role in how we think, feel and act. Much is interwoven in the fabric of the story line's drama. We know that affective or mood disorders -- which include major depression, bipolar illness and chronic or dysthymic depression -- are the manifestation of competing and complementary risk or protective factors. Akiskal and McKinney in 1975 described these factors generally as physiologic, genetic or familial, psychosocial, and developmental. *Grandma Grady's Grade-A Gray Day* weaves these factors in such a way that folks of all ages get an intuitive sense of how they relate without having to have them explicitly presented in text, table or diagram. Mood disorders, particularly Major Depression and Bipolar Disorders are clearly genetic but depend upon the interplay of other factors to become manifest. Early loss, a medical illness, a move away from family or friends, or a parent, particularly a mom, who is depressed and less available for hugs and praise, can all be contributors to whether a person becomes clinically depressed and requires treatment. We now know that the seasons of the year, with changes in exposure to sunlight, are also associated with affective disorders, particularly depression in a large number of individuals.

Yet many folks who get depressed and become aware of their impaired ability to function fail to seek treatment. Sometimes because those close to them fail to notice or are driven away by what seem to be the insatiable needs of the depressed person or the frustration engendered in others by the depressed person's failure to respond to kindness, consideration and other forms of help. Perhaps of greater

import is the stigma of mental illness that prevents many from seeking help who would benefit from early treatment. This black cloud of stigma surrounding mental illness is illustrative of old fallacies being resistant to scientific advances. For example, a number of imaging studies with PET scans and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies clearly demonstrate how depression affects the way we think and function. But the notions of moral weakness, or "all you need to do is think positively to snap out" of a clinical depression, are hard to put to rest. As psychosocial factors can precipitate a clinical mood disorder, talking therapies can also be used to treat mood disorders. In conjunction with medication, they can help resolve the depression, depending upon severity of the episode. We also know that the mood disorders generally are more like medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes that often become chronic with recurrent episodes and require ongoing monitoring and treatment when the depression or mania develop. Thus hope rather than despair needs to be the message to be delivered.

There is an interesting question for the reader who has accessed this work of art and fancy (story telling and pictorial) through the portal of this conscience development website to consider: How does a thinking, feeling state of mind such as depression that seems so linked to distress and dysfunction relate to moral behavior? You will just have to find out. Think, feel, expand your vocabulary and enjoy this really neat story that offers a positive and enlightening alternative to the Brother's Grimm.

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UMDNJ

Reference: Akiskal HS, McKinney WT, Jr. Overview of recent research in depression. Arch Gen Psychiatry 1975; 32:285-305

## GRANDMA GRADY'S GRADE-A GRAY DAY



GRETCHEN GRADY couldn't wait to get off the bus and run home. She had a joke to tell her Mom. She'd heard the joke from her best friend, Emily, who whispered it to her in class. This joke was so funny, Gretchen had nearly peed

in her pants. She had tried all kind of ways to keep from laughing out loud. She bit her lip and then pinched herself and then covered up her mouth with both hands. These things worked--sort of, but only for a while. When they stopped working, she didn't burst out laughing exactly, but she did let out a loud snort or two followed by a splutter and a very strong guffaw. Everyone in the class had heard her and turned to look. Except Emily. Emily acted like nothing extraordinary had happened and seemed to do just what she should, concentrating on the day's lesson. Sometimes Gretchen really hated Emily for being so cool. "I'm just more composed than you," Emily explained once, using a word she'd overheard from Mr. Moore when he'd talked with her mother at Open House.

"What's 'composed'?" Gretchen demanded to know. Emily said, "Oh you know, I can keep from showing my feelings, if I want to, I mean."

"Any feelings?" Gretchen did not believe her friend.



"Uh-huh. Any," Emily replied. " Like. O.K., you can't make me laugh unless I want to."

"Can too," Gretchen insisted. She tried tickling her.

"No fair! Tickling doesn't count," Emily pulled away, annoyed.

"O. K., O.K. No tickling. I can still make you laugh."

That's how the joke-telling contest had started. Gretchen wished it hadn't.



Mr. Moore was coming down the aisle.

"Anything wrong, Gretchen?" he asked.

" No--No--Nothing, Mr. Moore," Gretchen stammered. Just then, she felt as though she were the only kid in the classroom.

"Well then, if you have composed yourself, Gretchen, why don't you take the next question?" Mr. Moore tapped on Emily's desk as he passed.

Gretchen was grateful at least that Emily started squirming a little in her chair. "Ha!" thought Gretchen, "She can't fool Mr. Moore." Gretchen took a deep breath and let it out slowly before she read and answered the next question.

Now, on the bus ride home she was trying to remember just how Emily's joke went. Right as the bus driver pulled into the curb around from her house, Gretchen exclaimed, "Now I remember!"

The driver said, "See you tomorrow, Gretchen."



Gretchen waved, jumped to the curb, and ran home, repeating the punch line to herself over and over. She opened the door and yelled, "Mom, I'm home—Mom?" Her mother usually came up to greet her. Not today. Gretchen checked the basement first. She thought Mom would be there because Mom used the basement during the day to work. She'd set up a little workplace there. She had a second hand personal computer that she

learned to use by herself. Well, by herself, with Gretchen's help. Gretchen had used computers in school since first grade. She wasn't afraid of them like some grown-ups were, Mom included. So, Gretchen had helped her learn about computers. Now, she used the word processor to do typing for people. And Mom did a good job for them. She was hoping to learn how to use e-mail and the Internet. She also drew pictures sometimes. Gretchen thought Mom especially liked to paint. She never went to art school or anything but Dad said she really was talented. He hoped she would learn how to draw and paint using a computer program Dad had bought her for her birthday. There it was on the desk. The package hadn't been opened.

In fact, Mom wasn't even making pencil sketches, at least, not lately. "Would you draw another pony for me?" Gretchen had asked Mom on Saturday.



"Not right now, Gretchen, later maybe," she had said. When Gretchen thought that later had come, she reminded her Mom about the drawing. "I said 'later', Gretchen."

"You promised!" Gretchen cried.

"I did not promise!" Mom was upset. "You do that all the time, Gretchen! You keep saying I promised when I haven't. Anyway, you're good enough at drawing. Draw your own pony."

Gretchen's Mom wasn't at work in the basement. Gretchen went up to the kitchen. Mom wasn't there either. Usually breakfast dishes were in the sink, ready to be washed. Today the kitchen table hadn't been cleared. Gretchen looked around and thought, "Nothing up for dinner. Carry-out again tonight." Dad might get bothered by that. He said they couldn't afford it too often. But Gretchen didn't mind at all. She liked carryout. She liked to call it 'take-away' like Grandma Grady said they called it in Ireland. But where was Mom? Gretchen felt just a little uneasy. She didn't know just why but she was worried about something bad happening to Mom. She could feel herself breathing a little faster as she ran up the stairs to her parents' room. The door was closed. Gretchen tried to open it. It was locked from the inside. "Mom? Mom? I'm home. Where are you?" It seemed like Mom took forever to get to the door. When she did open it, the room was entirely dark.



The lights were out and the window shades pulled down. Gretchen said, "Mom, are you sick?"

"Oh you're home from school. Hi, Honey," Mom said. "No, I'm not sick. Just tired I guess. I was sleeping. Is school out already?"

"Uh-Huh," Gretchen nodded.

"Well...how was school today?" Mom asked absently as she made her way to the bathroom sink in order to splash water on her face.

"Emily told a joke—"

"A joke?" Mom said on her way to the closet to get a towel. "Out of clean towels," she muttered harshly. "Have to do more laundry."

"Well, Emily said—"

"Oh, look at the time! I have to get dinner started or your father will be mad." Mom headed downstairs. "So what was the joke?"

Gretchen didn't follow her right away. She couldn't remember how to tell the joke.





"Are you mad at Mom?" Gretchen asked her Dad as they drove up to the carryout window of the fast food restaurant. Ordinarily she liked going with her Dad to get carryout, especially if she got her way choosing which one. It was also a good idea to accompany him to make sure he didn't make any mistakes ordering.

"What makes you ask me that?" Dad was looking at the menu board as he spoke.

"Because she didn't make dinner?" Gretchen wondered.

"No that's O.K. I don't expect your Mom to cook every night, and I don't want to cook tonight either." Dad didn't cook very many dishes, Gretchen knew. He and Mom sometimes argued about that. Mom wanted him to make dinner more often. In fact she had suggested that he do that tonight instead of going for carryout. Then she had changed her mind and said, "Oh do what you want. I don't care." That ended that discussion. Mom turned on her heel and left the room. Dad had looked like he was ready to say more— then, when she walked away, he just looked a bit miserable.

Now it was almost their turn to order. "Did you find out what Mom wanted, like I asked you?" Dad finally looked at Gretchen. She thought he sounded all business, almost cross.

"She said she didn't want anything—she's not hungry," Gretchen said. As she responded, she noticed she wasn't very excited about dinner anymore either. She didn't know why because when she asked Dad which carryout place they were going to, he had just sighed and said he didn't care. So she had chosen her favorite place.

Dad decided, "Let's get her something anyway. She might be hungry later." Gretchen agreed. Together they remembered what sandwich and side orders Mom preferred. Dad was beginning to sound almost normal. Gretchen felt a little better.

As she nibbled her french fries on the way home, Dad reached over to snatch one. "Hey," she exclaimed. "Stay away from my french fries."



"Just seeing if they're fit for consumption, that's all," Dad said. He smiled.

"Uh--huh. Right," Gretchen said as she shielded her bag from further intrusions.

At supper, Gretchen's parents didn't talk very much to one another. Dad asked Mom what was wrong. Mom said, "Not a thing. Nothing's wrong." Dad became impatient. Later after Gretchen went to bed, she heard her parents yelling at each other. She went to sleep but tossed and turned.

## §



It was the first morning of the school break. Gretchen and her mother sat on the couch together, not quite touching but not very far apart either. Gretchen was reading a recent issue of American Girl magazine. Mom had a magazine

too. It lay open on her lap, but she wasn't looking at it. Gretchen glanced up at her Mom, looked down again, turned a page, found what she was looking for, and said, "Mom, what's this word?"

Mom didn't respond right away. Gretchen said, "Mom?"

Mom said, "What? Oh...what word, Hon?" Gretchen showed her.

"The puppy looked forlorn," Mom read from the magazine. "'Forlorn'? You know that word. 'Forlorn' means sad or blue."

"Oh. O.K." said Gretchen, and returned to her reading. But she stopped again when she heard her mother give out a sharp sob. Gretchen put her head against her mother's arm. And Mom began to cry steadily.

Gretchen tried to comfort her mother. She asked Mom what was wrong. Mom said, "There is something wrong with me. I'm not sleeping. I don't have much energy. I'm tired all the time." Gretchen wanted to know more. Mom couldn't explain but said she thought she needed some help. She said she would call the family doctor's office. After a while she did and left a voice message. Then she called Gretchen's grandmother. Afterwards, Mom said, "Gretchen I would like you to stay with Grandma over the spring holidays."

While worried about her mother and not eager to leave

her until she knew more about what the trouble might be, Gretchen did not make any strong protests. She liked staying with Grandma Grady.

Grandma Grady was Mom's stepmother. She had married Mom's father when Mom was a child of 9 years. That was when the family had lived in the state of Washington. "By the Sound," Grandma often said, and would sometimes add, "where I could





glimpse the disappearing mountain." These wistful utterances did much to endear Grandma Grady to almost everyone—except maybe (especially lately) her own stepdaughter. Mom would respond to what she called 'Grandma's poetic tendencies' by saying "That needs some 'demystification'."

She told Gretchen: "The Puget Sound is not a song in Grandma's heart, it's an inlet of the ocean, a route for commercial vessels and the U.S. Navy to ports like Seattle and Tacoma and Whidbey Island."

Grandma Grady did not seem miffed at all and assured Gretchen, "The Sound is part of the great Salish Sea and filled with legends and orcas."

Mom said, "The disappearing mountain is nothing magic. It often disappears behind the clouds—there are an awful lot of rainy days in Washington. Grandma knows that very well. In fact one of the reasons we moved was Grandma's emotional response to the long winters of the Pacific Northwest— well, I don't need to go into that."

Grandma whispered confidentially to Gretchen: "I have sometimes seen it make a brief appearance even here." Mom overheard and irritably dismissed Grandma Grady as making too much of cloud formations on the horizon. Then Mom seemed to lose it. "You don't want her to think you are a raving lunatic, do you?" she blurted out and left the room abruptly.

At first, Grandma Grady looked like she had been struck in the face. Then she seemed to recover and patted Gretchen's hand, "You wait here. I want to talk with your

mother." Long moments followed, Gretchen heard the word 'depression'.



Of course Gretchen had heard the word 'depression' used before then. She had heard persons her own age, like Emily, declare that they were 'stressed-out and depressed.' Maybe Emily was; but somehow it didn't seem to Gretchen whatever Emily was talking about lasted very long. Emily, anyway, seemed to be able to put aside what she was feeling and get into playing at recess or after school.

Even so, Emily was the person to whom Gretchen went first. "What's it like when you're depressed, Emily?"

"Terrible," came the reply. "I can't stand it and nobody else can either. It's my *new chemicals*, you know. They're all out of balance."

"New chemicals?"

"Yeah, that's what my Dad says makes me so moody. Not just depression, you know, I have mood-swings. He says I'm just like a teeter-totter."

"Mood-swings?"

"Yup! Both ways. Can't you tell? And they change really fast," she added with a hint of pride. "I'm a rapid-cycler."

"I know," Gretchen pretended she did know. She had to admit Emily could easily outdistance her when they were riding bikes but she didn't like to be reminded.

"I'm not talking about riding bikes now," Emily said a little too smugly.

"I know," Gretchen lied, but her doubts were apparent to her friend.

"Look. You know the Polar Express?"

"Yes I do," Gretchen was relieved to have something about which she was very sure. "It's the train that takes the little boy all the way to the North Pole to see Santa."

"Well, my Dad says I'm on the 'Bipolar Express.'"

"What's that?"

"When I'm giggly and a chatterbox, I'm at the North Pole. When I'm depressed, I'm at the South Pole. Now do you get it?"

Gretchen did not get it; but she could tell Emily was becoming impatient with her and wanted her to leave.

"Well I'll talk to you later. I have to go home now," Gretchen said—even though she was not eager to return home. A person may not be eager to do something but can still be anxious to do it—worried that if she doesn't do it, something bad is bound to happen. That was true of Gretchen



just then. Gretchen was worried about her mother and felt she needed to be home to make sure Mom was O.K.

It was Grandma Grady who answered the door. Gretchen was immediately alarmed, "Where's my Mom?"

"Don't worry, Hon, she'll be home shortly. She asked me to be here to greet you."

"Where is she?"

"She has an appointment."

Gretchen sighed with relief, "Oh—O.K."

"So does your Grandma Grady get at least 'Hello'?"

Gretchen gave her a hug, and peered around her shoulder to see if there were oatmeal cookies and milk on the table for snack-time. There were.

## §

"Computer Lab! That's where," thought Gretchen. She was considering using her computer time to Google 'Depression'. It was not what she was supposed to be doing. She and her parents had signed an Internet Agreement with Mr. Moore. Only searches that were approved by Mr. Moore could be made during school. But Mr. Moore was way across the room. It wouldn't take long, if only she spelled it right the first time. She sounded the word out and then typed in "D-E-P-R-E-S-S-I- O- N." On the very first try she had put in both 'S's' and remembered the 'I'. Still, she wasn't ready for what she saw in front of her:

*Web Results 1-10 of about 127,000,000 for Depression [definition] (0.04 sec).*

One third of the way down the page on the left she saw:

*Depression Information. Get the Facts About Depression and Review Your Treatment Options.*

She clicked on the bright blue hyper-link. What faced her was:

*#1 Prescribed Brand of Its Kind.*

She scrolled down the page, but did not immediately find anything to tell her what 'Depression' might mean. She clicked the 'BACK' arrow to the results page and scrolled down to the bottom:

*NIMH: Depression.*

"NIMH?" Gretchen muttered aloud, then silently to herself she added, "Oh, like Mrs. Frisby and The Rats of NIMH." Gretchen remembered the story, shook her head vigorously, forgot where she was and said far too loudly, "I DON'T THINK SO—"

"I don't either," she heard a voice originating somewhere from above her right shoulder. It was Mr. Moore. Gretchen scrambled to close the window she had opened on the Internet. Mr. Moore's hand was over her hand before she could click. She froze in position while he looked carefully over her search results. He typed an address in the search box 'www.aacap.org' then keeping his hand over hers, he guided the mouse to click "GO." When that web page came up, Mr. Moore found a link, which was labeled "Facts for Families." He said, "Click it." Gretchen did. Then Mr. Moore lifted his hand, freeing hers to scroll down what seemed a very long list. She stopped when she recognized the word "Depression" and clicked on it. She read this much:



*Not only adults become depressed. Children and teenagers also may have depression, which is a treatable illness. Depression is defined as an illness when the feelings of depression persist and interfere with a child or adolescent's ability to function.*

*Gretchen's Mom was neither a child nor a teenager. She read a little further on:*

*Depression also tends to run in families.*



"Oh-oh," She muttered to herself just loudly enough that Mr. Moore (who had moved on to give her some privacy) turned his head back towards her. She proceeded:

*The behavior of depressed children and teenagers may differ from the behavior of depressed adults. Child and adolescent psychiatrists advise parents to be aware of signs of depression in their youngsters.*

What she had found so far wasn't as helpful as she wanted. She closed the document and looked over the list of "Facts for Families" again. A few caught her eye. There appeared one called "Divorce #4" that she almost opened but decided she would not. There was another one, "Grandparenting #77" she thought she might come back to after she found—"Parents (mentally ill) #39." This has to be it!" Gretchen told herself. She was excited. She opened and looked through the document:

*Mental illnesses in parents represent a risk for children in the family. These children have a higher risk for developing mental illnesses than other children. When both parents are mentally ill, the chance is even greater that the child might become mentally ill. The risk is particularly strong when a parent has one or more of the following: Bipolar Disorder, an anxiety disorder, ADHD, schizophrenia, alcoholism or other drug abuse, or depression. Risk can be inherited from parents, through the genes. An inconsistent, unpredictable family environment also contributes to psychiatric illness in children. Mental illness of a parent can put stress on the marriage and affect the parenting abilities of the couple, which in turn can harm the child.*

*Some protective factors that can decrease the risk to children include—*

Gretchen stopped reading. She wasn't finding out about her Mom. She was finding out about what might happen to herself. This was a little scary, like listening to Emily talk about all the bad things that can happen to a person, but mostly it was disappointing. Even so, she raised her hand and asked, "Mr. Moore can I print this out?"

Mr. Moore glanced the document and nodded. Then he said, "Gretchen, you're not in any trouble but I would like to see you after class."

§

"A shrink!! You've been to a shrink?" Dad's voice boomed from downstairs. You don't need a shrink." There was an interval of quiet during which Gretchen strained to hear her mother's response. However, her mother's voice was just barely discernible, her words not at all.

"Drugs!!" Dad again.

"Not 'Drugs'. Medicine." This time Gretchen heard her mother distinctly and could appreciate the sound of firm resistance her mother forged from weary words.

"Are you crazy? Don't you read the papers? Pharmas!" What did farmers have to do with it? Gretchen wondered. "Pharmas," Dad repeated, his ire rising even higher than before. "Those drug companies put their pills out on the market before they're anywhere near sure about all the side effects, then when any studies don't go the way they want, they don't let people know about them. And the pharmas practically pay the shrinks to use their name brands."

Mom made an audible sigh, and then said, "The medication I'm supposed to take has been around awhile. It's even generic now. The doctor went over the major side effects and gave me a fact sheet. Do you want to look at it?" After that Dad lowered his voice even if he didn't quite adopt the hushed tones of Mom. The 'conversation' became more like one and, for the tired out girl upstairs, a susurrus more reassuring. Eventually Gretchen was able to sleep.

Spring holiday at Grandma's was later than usual and the colder days with snow flurries were fast becoming a faded memory for Gretchen. Still, she noticed as they spaded the garden together that Grandma eyed the sky warily. With Grandma's help, Gretchen had come to recognize the customary succession of early spring: crocuses, daffodils, forsythia (which she called "for Cynthia" because a girl named Cynthia had once been her babysitter) redbud, magnolia and dogwood. Not far off in the future, moonbeam coreopsis, lamb's ear, sedum, rhododendron and hostas. And then the lilacs, of course.

Gretchen could not enjoy the prospect of lilacs as much as she wanted. The night before when she and grandmother were snuggled under a throw in the living room, Gretchen had opened her heart about her worries about Mom. It was true, she complained about the hardships she had experienced since her Mom had changed and how her Dad was acting. Mom was mean sometimes and impatient. Dad stayed away from the house. So Gretchen complained and Grandma listened. But mostly it was worry about her family that Gretchen disclosed amid her tears. She slept better that night than she had in a long time. The next day was especially fine for gardening.



Grandma Grady liked to talk about things of all sorts while she gardened. Gretchen never knew for sure what the topic would be, but she had learned to listen because it usually had something to do with her. "Gretchen, persons use different names for being aware, and summoning up the will power to make choices and act on the awareness, of what's good and what's bad, what's right and what's wrong.

"A long time ago in China, there was a philosopher. Mencius was his name. Mencius believed that in each and everybody there were seeds that could ripen into the heart of the personality. Mencius called it the 'heart-mind.' Mencius named four seeds. The first seed was being connected with and caring about others. The second was to feel strong

emotion when behaving badly. The third was to show respect for rules for living set out by persons in authority. The fourth was to be able to tell the difference between right and wrong and choose a path accordingly. Mencius believed when fully ripened and joined, the seeds enabled a person to share in the moral breath of the universe. I believe something like that, too."

"It sounds like a person's -oh, what's that word?"

Gretchen mused.

"Are you thinking of a person's conscience? The part of a person that helps figure out good and bad, right and wrong?"

"Yeah, that's it."

"I think what we understand about conscience today is something like what Mencius had in mind long ago. Here, let's count the seeds." Grandma had four in the palm of her hand. She picked one up with her other hand. "Here's the first: conscience begins with being *connected*. Like you are with your Mom and Dad—"

" -And my friends, and Mr. Moore and especially you, Grandma."

"Ah well, you are very well connected, I must say. Here's the second seed: in conscience there are moral emotions galore- not just the ones that come out with wrongdoing. Don't forget the pride you had when you helped water the garden and when you saved the robin's egg. The emotional part of conscience also has to do with taking care of the emotions—managing them."

"Like anger management?"



"If you like. Or shame management or guilt management. Or making it good again by repairing damage done.

"Grandma, you and I had to stake up some plants in your garden after a windstorm, once."

" So we did. So we did... You have a good memory. Hmm.

In my garden or when I arrange flowers, I sometimes pretend that the flowers are so many different emotions, in a riot of different hues and shades and combinations. I pretend some of the plants that don't have flowers, like the ferns and mosses, are so many thoughts and memories called up to surround the emotions. But I am just like that girl in the nursery rhyme—Mary, Mary Quite Contrary— and sometimes, contrariwise, I pretend the emotions are a floral mix surrounding the thoughts. Put them all together and they're suitable for framing."

"Grandma, your garden's way too big for a picture frame."

"Don't need a picture frame. There are other plants, which are especially good for borders, that can frame everything else. I don't think of them as either thoughts or feelings but rather as a way of saying THIS IS IMPORTANT, THIS IS PRECIOUS, WON'T YOU JUST LOOK AT IT? Values are part of conscience too. That's the third seed."

"What's the fourth one?"

"Oh, choosing what to do, trying one way or another out, making a pathway or two, taking care not to cause harm as you go."

"What else?"

"Cultivating yourself as a person of conscience. Imagining and thinking about how you will live in a world where there is both good and bad."

## §

"My Mom's depression is bad."

"Uh-hmmm. One of the weeds."

"Why do you call it that?"

"Things that interfere with the seeds ripening and joining together. I call them 'Weeds'. I will tell you more, but first you tell me what you have learned about depression."

Gretchen told her grandmother what she had heard from her friend, seen on the Internet, talked about with Mr. Moore and what she had actually observed at home. "It makes my Mom tired and grouchy all the time. She doesn't draw or paint. She wants to be alone. She won't eat and she cries a lot. It's her new chemicals—"

"*New chemicals?*" Grandma Grady seemed puzzled.

"That's what Emily said."

"Maybe Emily meant 'neuro-chemicals'. When people say 'neuro-' they are often talking about the brain. Sometimes people talk about a neuro-chemical imbalance to explain depression."

"Oh. But if it's an im- im-

"-balance?"

"Yeah, in the brain, then medicine should help, shouldn't it? But Dad said he's not sure the medicines they use to fix

the im-balance are safe. He wants Mom to exercise more and take vitamins, instead."

"Well, it's a serious decision to take any medicine. Not a one of them comes without side effects. I've tried some from time to time, myself."

"You have, Grandma—do you get depressed?"

"I do, indeed. Especially in the gloom of winter. I can usually tell when the first *Grade-A Gray Day* of the year has come even before I open the curtains in my bedroom."

Gretchen looked at the sky above them and tried to appreciate the color and light prevailing at the moment. "Did medicine help you?"

"There have been times I needed medication, so I took it. I also found that I could use light to change my neuro-chemical imbalance."

"Light can help?"

"Depends on the kind of depression."

"What if I stay up at night and shine a flashlight on Mom?"

"I wouldn't advise it. Let her figure out what's right for her body and what she's willing to try. Besides you need your sleep too."

"I think depressions that occur in people are like weeds that spoil a flower garden. Depression makes it hard for persons to experience all the human emotions they're meant to experience. Depression makes it hard to think freely."

Hard sometimes to be in touch with what's most important—the values that make life worth living. Depression makes it hard to summon up will power needed to make choices."

"You make it sound like depression doesn't just make a person sad or grouchy or tired but also makes it hard for conscience to work."

"It makes it much harder for conscience to work. Depression stresses conscience and interferes with it. Persons of conscience can become really worried about keeping strong moral connections with the people they care about, living a moral emotional life that includes some joy now and then and being able to retrieve life hugging values. So they make a choice. They choose to take prescribed medication even if they are worried about the side effects."

Gretchen was mulling over all this then asked, "Weeds come from seeds too, don't they Grandma?"

"Yes."

"So how does someone tell the difference?"

"Good for you, Gretchen: a very good question with an excellent point. I think your point is that something might be mistaken for a weed that's really a flower. Among emotions, sadness is often a flower and not a weed."

"Like if you lose someone you love, I think it's good to be sad."

"Yes, I do too. So back to your question: how can a person tell when something's a weed and not a flower? And how does a person weed out the weeds without harming the flowers? Not always easy to tell all by oneself. Sometimes a person needs help. Hmm. Just like weeds can be got rid of in

different ways so can depressions. Light or not, medicine or not, usually a person needs to talk to someone too."

"Yeah like a therapist. I think Mom is seeing one now."

"Sometimes it takes someone else to help a person discover different pathways through the garden. When I was in therapy. I found ways to change my habits of thinking to look at things and tell my story differently.

"Sometimes do more than one person in a family get therapy? Could my Dad?"

"It's certainly a choice he might make."

"Dad called up Mom's doctor. He's not so upset about Mom taking medicine now if she wants it. But he's not so sure about therapy."

"Give him time."

## §

Not long afterward, Mom drove up. That was a surprise. She was not expected to pick up Gretchen for three more days. Mom asked if she might stay and sketch pictures of the garden.

"Like Monet depicting his garden in Giverny?" Grandma laughed. Gretchen knew Monet was a famous artist.

"Not quite so ambitious," Mom replied.

Various enterprises went on quietly the remainder of the afternoon. However the birdsong was from time to time

particularly strong. Maybe that was what made Gretchen take a chance. "Mom, what did the happy bird say to the sad one?"

"I don't know. What?"

"Why, 'Hope you can chirrup', of course."

"Of course," Mom smiled then and hugged her daughter. Then Mom picked up her brushes and easel and set to work. Gretchen and Grandma Grady resumed their labors in the garden. No one could say how much time passed until Gretchen looked up and wiped her brow.

She had a very quizzical look, shielded her eyes from the afternoon glare and pointed to the horizon. Grandma looked and nodded, but said nothing, putting her finger to her lips so that nothing would be said to distract Gretchen's mother from her painting. Only much later, when Mom's painting was finished would Gretchen and her grandmother both recognize what might be taken for just a hint of a disappearing mountain.

## §





## Note to the Reader:

*Facts for Families*, a few of which catch Gretchen's attention in the story, and the companion series *Facts for Teachers*, have been created by members of the **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**. They are concise, educational resources that we highly recommend. They are freely available for downloading as a public service at the Academy website ([www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)). They may be duplicated and distributed on condition that proper attribution to the Academy is given and they are not used for monetary profit.

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